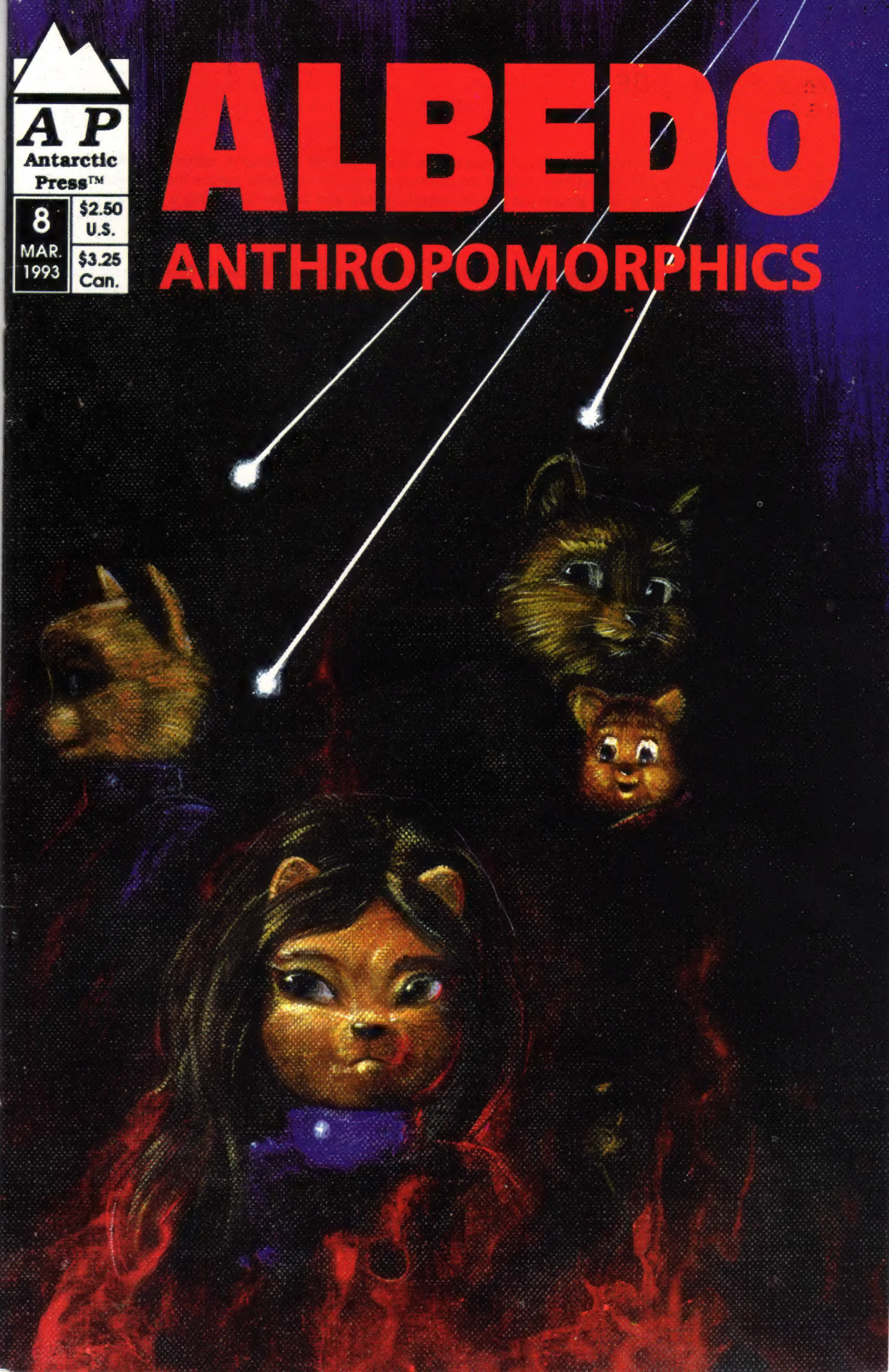
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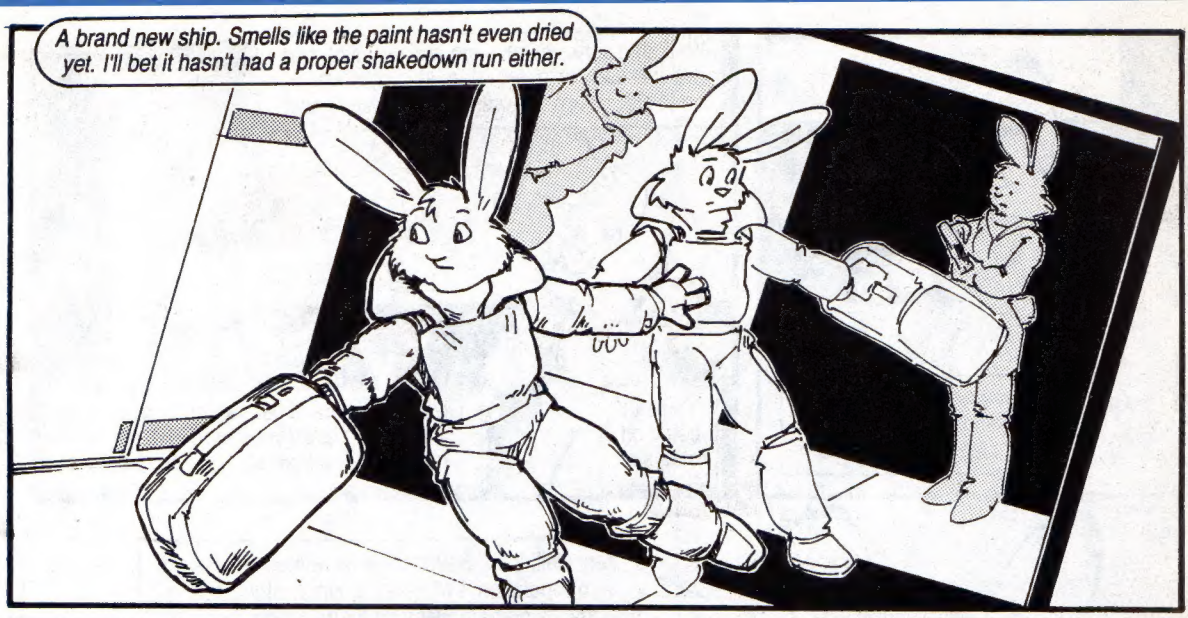
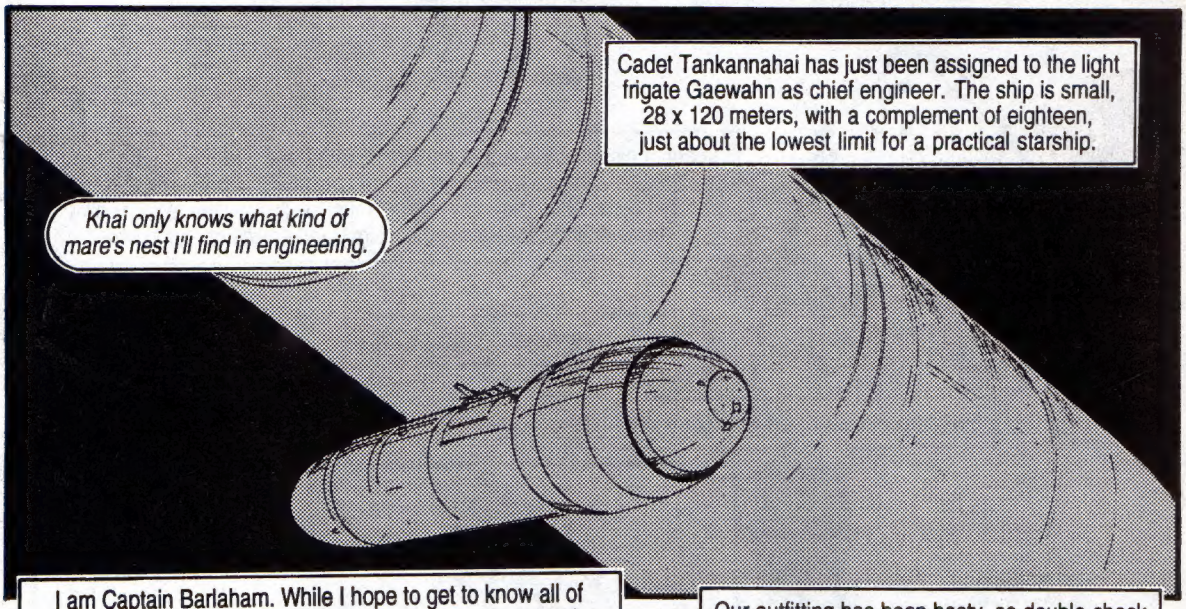
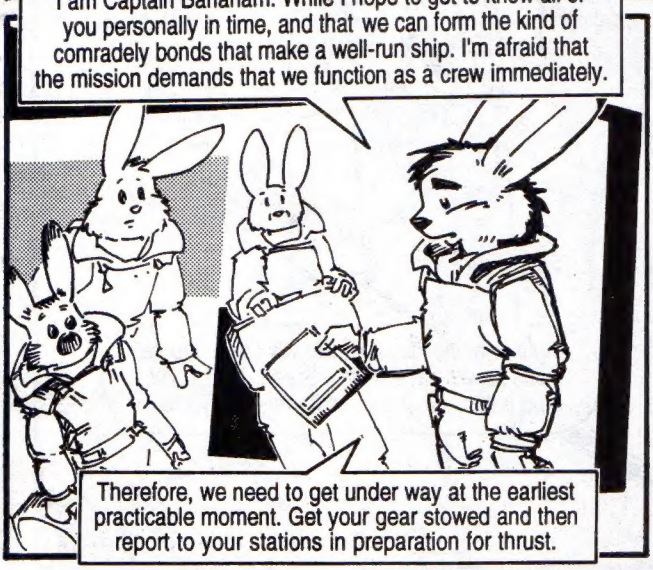
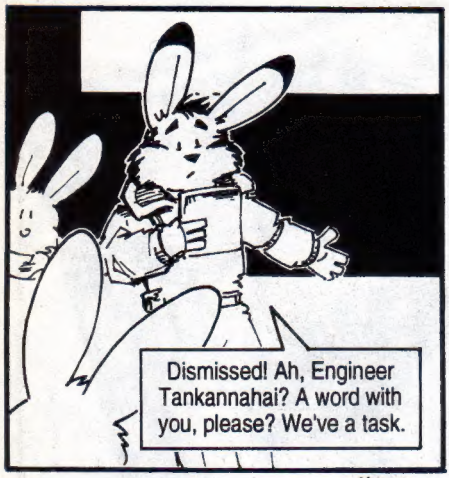
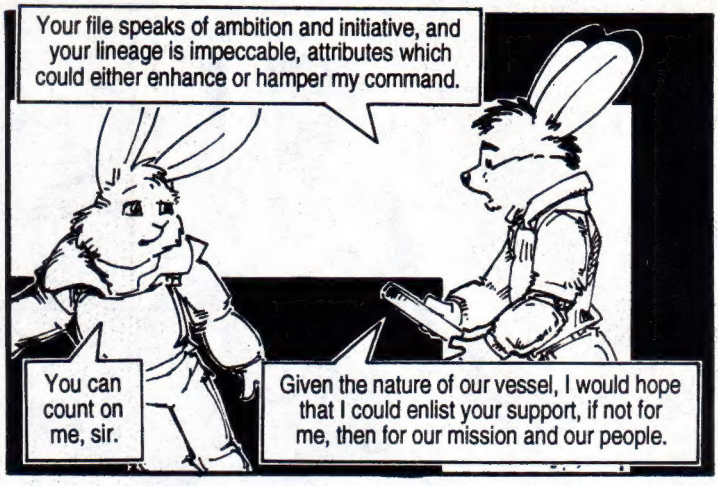

A brand new ship. Smells like the paint hasn't even dried yet. I'll bet it hasn't had a proper shakedown run either.


Cadet Tankannahai has just been assigned to the light frigate Gaewahn as chief engineer. The ship is small, 28 x 120 meters, with a complement of eighteen, just about the lowest limit for a practical starship.
Khai only knows what kind of mare's nest I'll find in engineering.

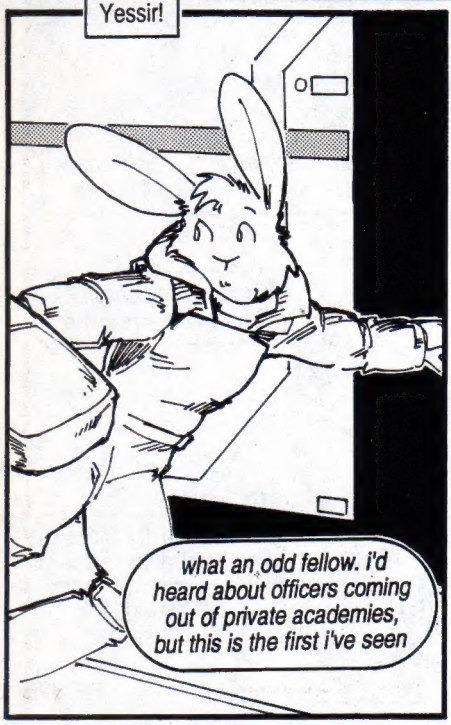

I am Captain Barlaham. While I hope to get to know all of you personally in time, and that we can form the kind of comradely bonds that make a well-run ship. I'm afraid that the mission demands that we function as a crew immediately.
Therefore, we need to get under way at the earliest practicable moment. Get your gear stowed and then report to your stations in preparation for thrust.

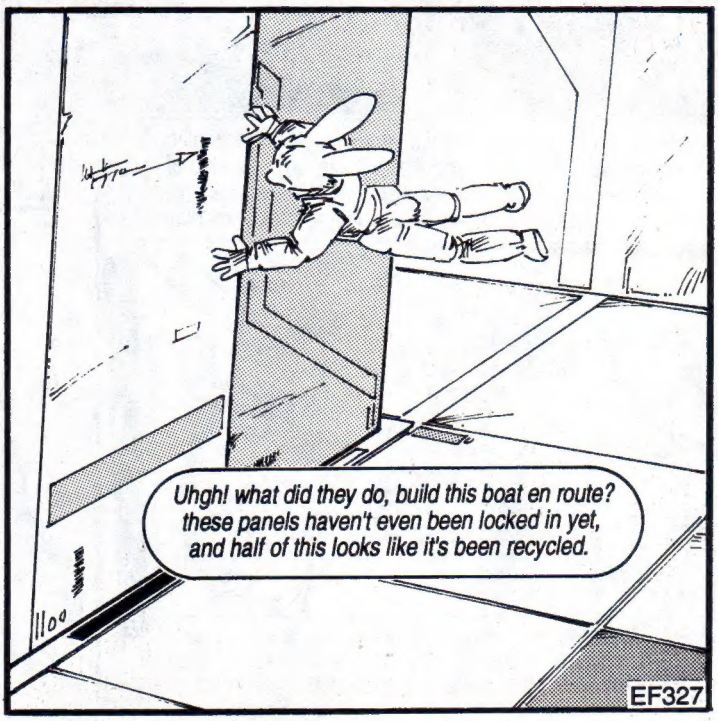
Our outfitting has been hasty, so double-check everything before you use it for the first time.
Gosh. He isn't that much older than me.
The transit crew has left notices about some of the obvious issues.
Euuw!

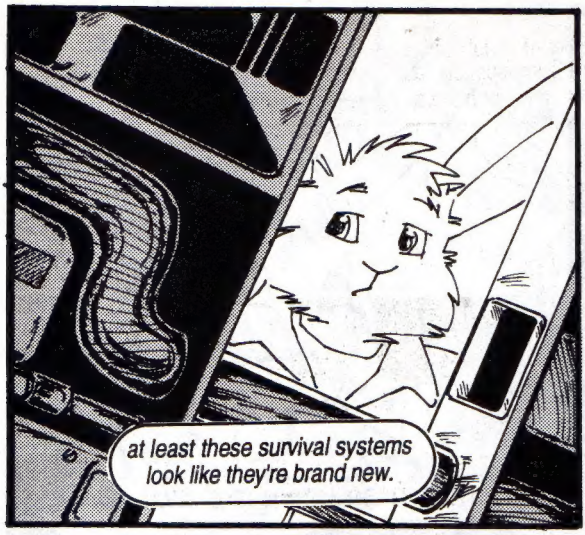

Dismissed! Ah, Engineer Tankannahai? A word with you, please? We've a task.

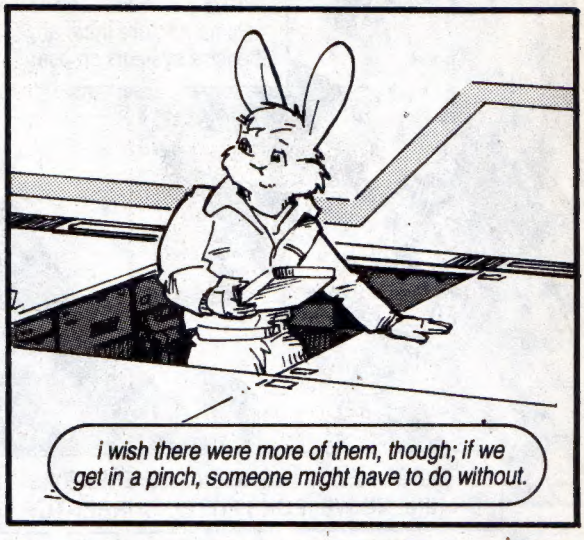

Your file speaks of ambition and initiative, and your lineage is impeccable, attributes which could either enhance or hamper my command.
You can count on me, sir.
Given the nature of our vessel, I would hope that I could enlist your support, if not for me, then for our mission and our people.

Very well, then. Beyond the immediate necessities of operation, I will need a survey of the ship and its preparedness for future action. And - .
And?
I cannot disguise the fact of my junior nature and that my youthful lack of experience imposes practical limits on my ability to fulfill the demands of ship's command. Therefore, while I must singly hold the responsibility of this captaincy, I welcome the insight and advice of my officers.
Uh, sure. Anything you say.
Excellent, excellent, sir! Now carry on!

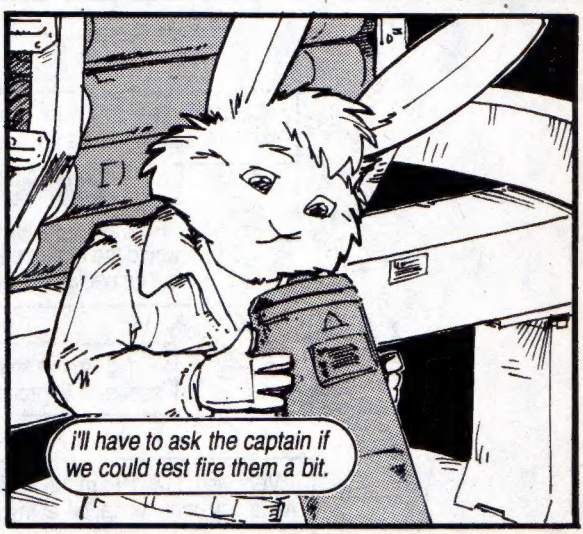

Yessir!
what an odd fellow. i'd heard about officers coming out of private academies, but this is the first i've seen

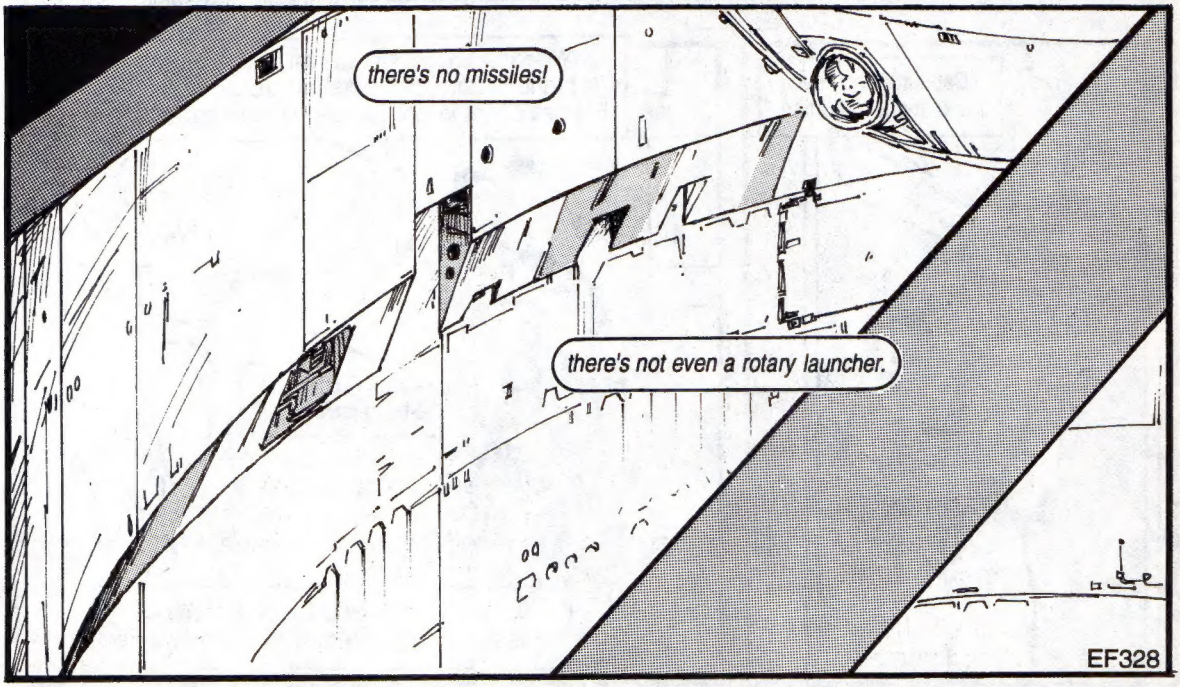

Uhgh! what did they do, build this boat en route? these panels haven't even been locked in yet, and half of this looks like it's been recycled.


at least these survival systems look like they're brand new.

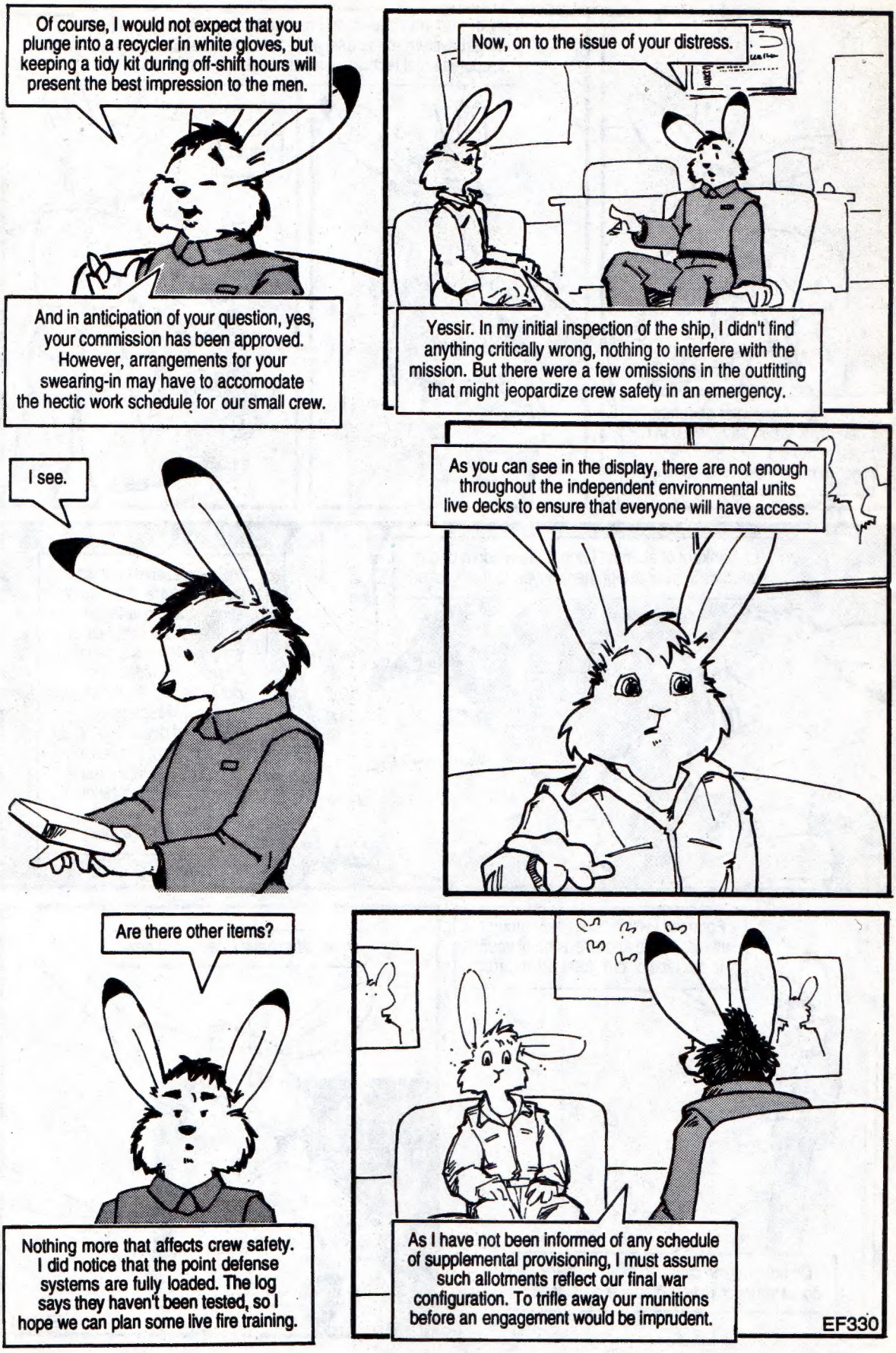

i wish there were more of them, though; if we get in a pinch, someone might have to do without.

defensive systems look good fully loaded.


i'll have to ask the captain if we could test fire them a bit.

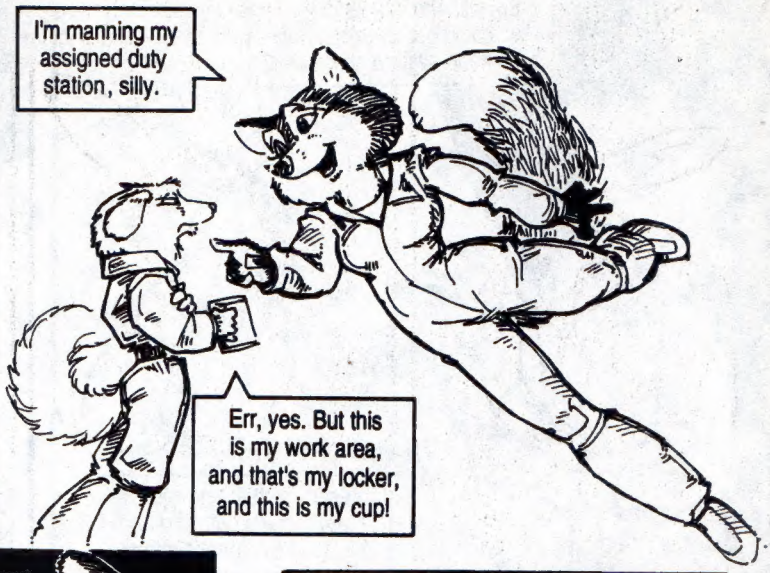

there's no missiles!
there's not even a rotary launcher.

Computer, are there any offensive systems on board?
THERE ARE NO LONG-RANGE ENERGY OR KINETIC WEAPONS FITTED CURRENTLY.
Are we scheduled to be fitted with a rotary dispenser for ACVs?
THAT INFORMATION IS UNAVAILABLE.
Captain, this is Engineer Tankannahai, I'd like to talk to you as soon as possible.
Engineer Tankannahai, would the matter preclude our immediate departure?
No sir, the ship seems fit to proceed.
Very well, I will inform navigation to begin thrust. As to any conference, be at my quarters in an hour.
Yessir.
Captain? Engineer Tankannahai reporting.
Welcome, Engineer, or as I am now privileged to be the first to properly address you, Lieutenant of Engineers Tankannahai, please enter and be seated.
uh - Was I supposed to be in uniform?
No, no. But while we cruise, class B dress is to be encouraged, especially among my officers.

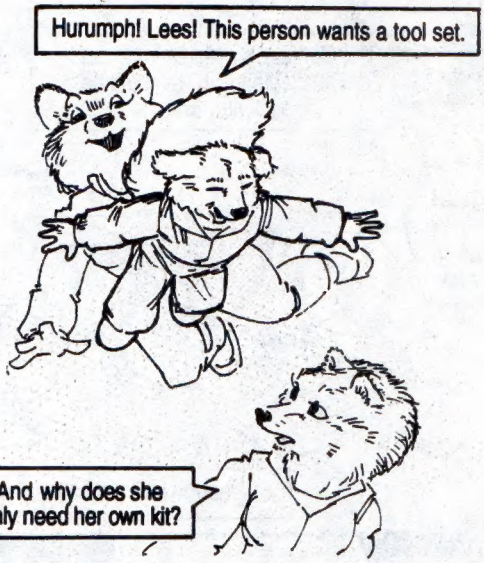

Of course, I would not expect that you plunge into a recycler in white gloves, but keeping a tidy kit during off-shift hours will present the best impression to the men.
And in anticipation of your question, yes, your commission has been approved. However, arrangements for your swearing-in may have to accomodate the hectic work schedule for our small crew.
Now, on to the issue of your distress.
Yessir. In my initial inspection of the ship, I didn't find anything critically wrong, nothing to interfere with the mission. But there were a few omissions in the outfitting that might jeopardize crew safety in an emergency.
I see.
As you can see in the display, there are not enough throughout the independent environmental units live decks to ensure that everyone will have access.
Are there other items?
Nothing more that affects crew safety. I did notice that the point defense systems are fully loaded. The log says they haven't been tested, so I hope we can plan some live fire training.
As I have not been informed of any schedule of supplemental provisioning, I must assume such allotments reflect our final war configuration. To trifle away our munitions before an engagement would be imprudent.
EF330

No sup - ! Ah, what about the empty weapon bay? We don't even have a carousel. We've got to have more stuff coming?
My orders are specific: to proceed by our best route to the target system at the assigned time and speed, receiving supplemental tactical instructions as the action unfolds.
Sir?
Lt. Tankannahai, must I doubt the wisdom of our superiors in their assignment of you to this vessel?
Your excessive concerns for the welfare of the crew suggest an unwillingness to accept the fortunes of war, or perhaps a certain personal timidity. Your doubts about the function of our weapons, the wisdom of our orders, and by extension, the viability of our cause, leave me to question your dedication to me, this ship, and the nation that it serves.
For now, I will forgive your outburst as merely the apprehension of youth in the face of our great adventure.
Do not give me cause to more formally doubt your conviction. You are dismissed.
oh no, what have i stepped in now?
EF331

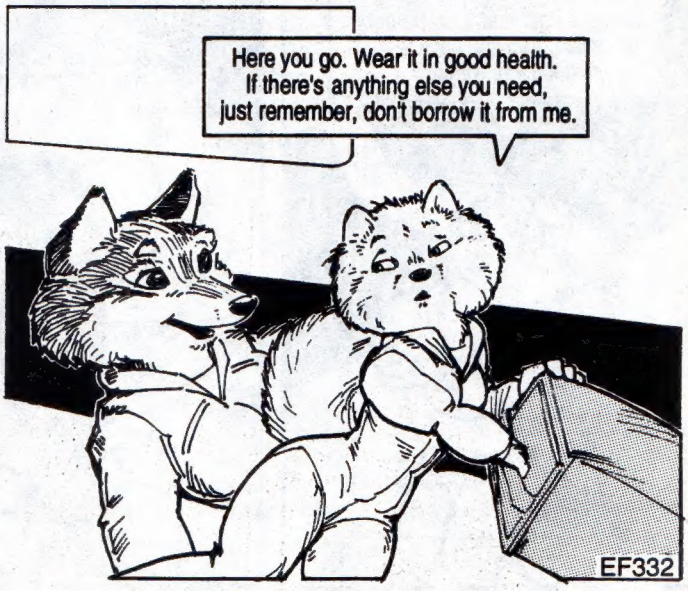
Hello Dru!
Frieda! What are you doing here?

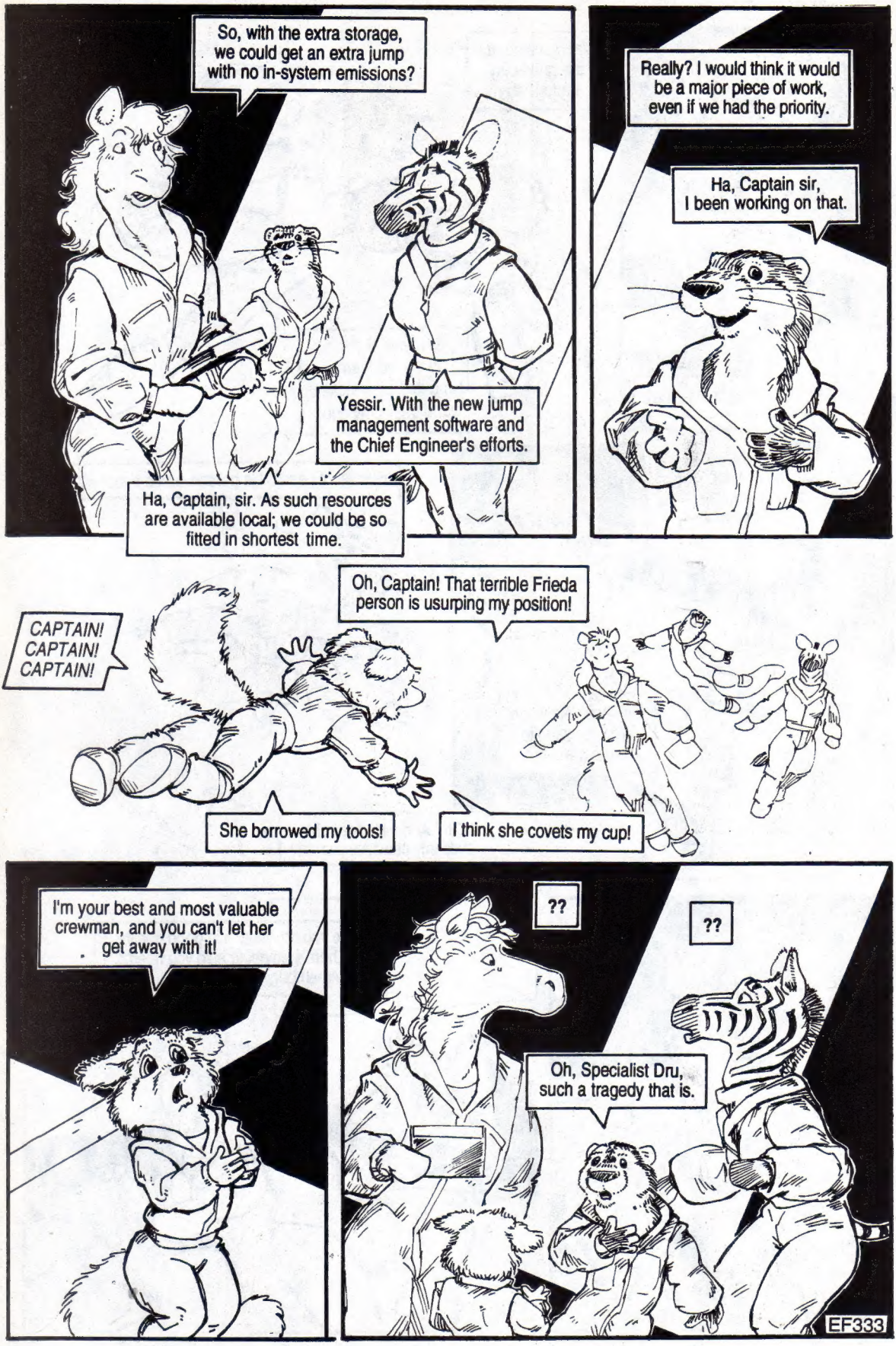

I'm manning my assigned duty station, silly.
Err, yes. But this is my work area, and that's my locker, and this is my cup!

So you just do your own job, in your own area, with your own tools.
Oh-kaee! But when are you going to issue me any?


Hurumph! Lees! This person wants a tool set.
Oh? And why does she suddenly need her own kit?

So she won't use mine.
Ooooh.


Here you go. Wear it in good health. If there's anything else you need, just remember, don't borrow it from me.


So, with the extra storage, we could get an extra jump with no in-system emissions?
Yessir. With the new jump management software and the Chief Engineer's efforts.
Ha, Captain, sir. As such resources are available local; we could be so fitted in shortest time.
Really? I would think it would be a major piece of work, even if we had the priority.
Ha, Captain sir, I been working on that.
CAPTAIN! CAPTAIN! CAPTAIN!
Oh, Captain! That terrible Frieda person is usurping my position!
She borrowed my tools!
I think she covets my cup!
I'm your best and most valuable crewman, and you can't let her get away with it!
??
??
Oh, Specialist Dru, such a tragedy that is.
EF333

There, there, Dru. I'll see that she doesn't trespass anymore.
You will? -sniffle- Thank you, Captain!
Now back to work.
Happy happy!
Joy joy!
Specialist Dru is good crew - But he is awful territorial and insecure. Be perfect for security.
Hi Ho! Ilnya?
yes?
We're supposed to work together. Frieda, point defense and ship's security.
Ah, the loud one. Yes, we are to be here. Please to establish yourself.
Together we must coordinate our task management - .
Ah, swell! You like to keep the cabin cool! I like it cool!
And we got lots of room to stow our stuff!
Ah, personal material is to be in quarters.
Oh, heck! That's okay! Once we're under way, we'll be all but living here anyway!
We'll be great buds, you'll see! I'll ask if we can be bunkies too!
EF334

So, when are you going to assert yourself?

Yes, Cousin, the Governor's mansion is yours for the taking.

Why bother with that? The constitution allows for a dictator in the face of civil crisis.

There is only one problem with all this discussion.

What is it, boy? Do you have some private agenda?

You seem to think I have some greater ambition.

But the ambition is yours.

Especially yours, Mother.

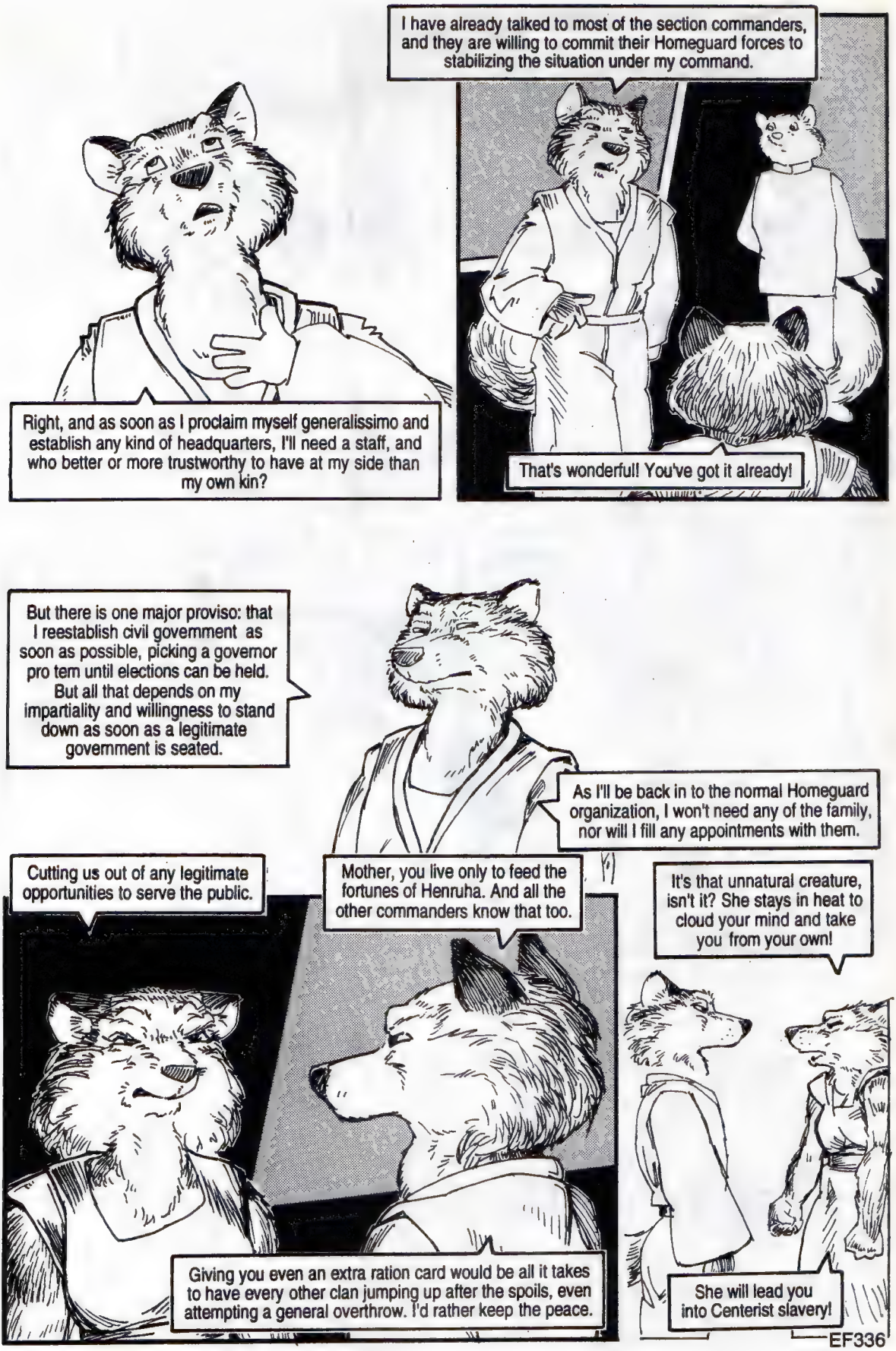
If I do anything at all, it will be entirely legel and for the benefit of all the people, not just clan Henruha.

We only want what is best for everyone.

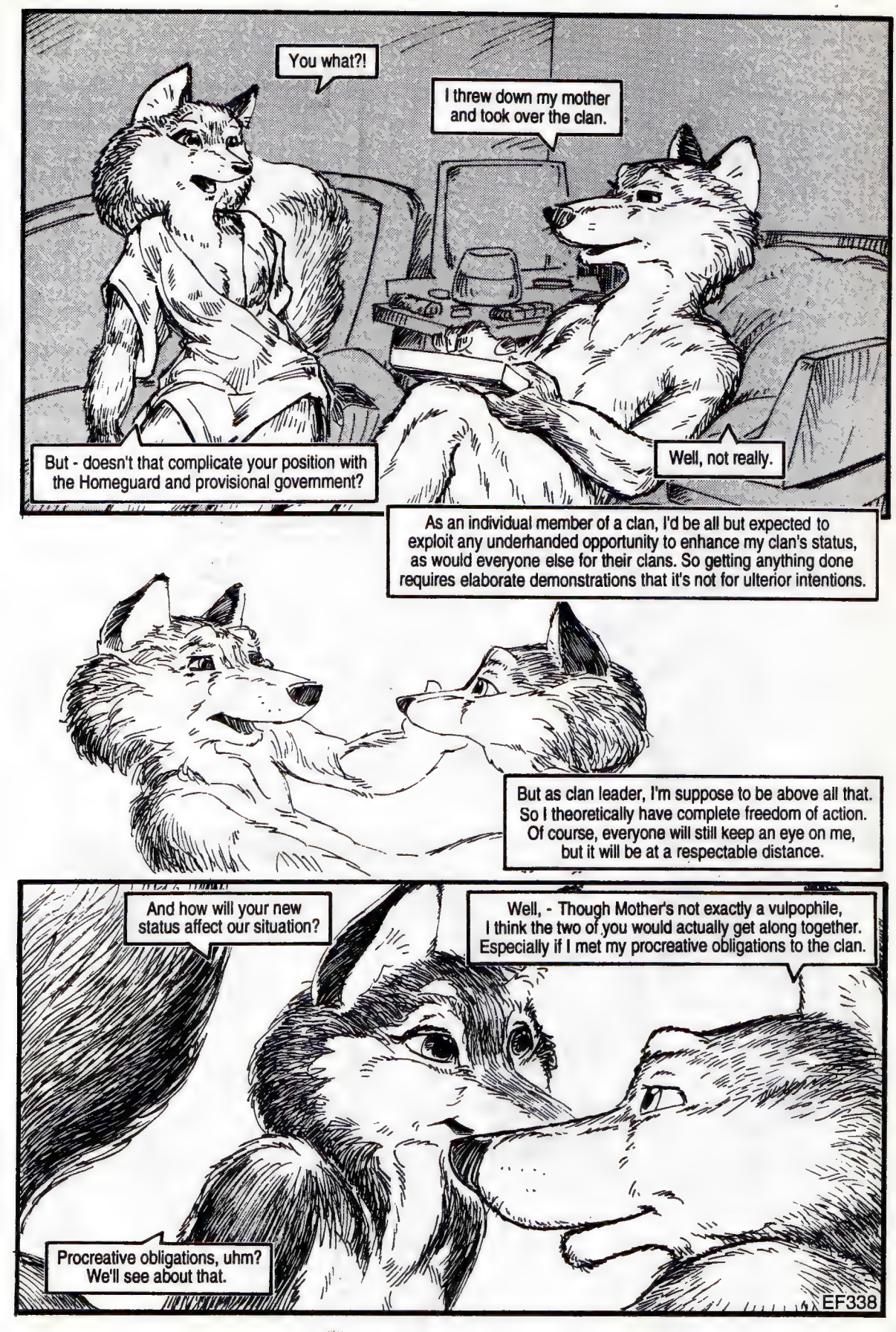
That is not fair.

Reestablishing peace and order.

That's all anyone wants.


I have already talked to most of the section commanders, and they are willing to commit their Homeguard forces to stabilizing the situation under my command.
Right, and as soon as I proclaim myself generalissimo and establish any kind of headquarters, I'll need a staff, and who better or more trustworthy to have at my side than my own kin?
That's wonderful! You've got it already!
But there is one major proviso: that I reestablish civil government as soon as possible, picking a governor pro tem until elections can be held. But all that depends on my impartiality and willingness to stand down as soon as a legitimate government is seated.
As I'll be back in to the normal Homeguard organization, I won't need any of the family, nor will I fill any appointments with them.
Cutting us out of any legitimate opportunities to serve the public.
Mother, you live only to feed the fortunes of Henruha. And all the other commanders know that too.
It's that unnatural creature, isn't it? She stays in heat to cloud your mind and take you from your own!
Giving you even an extra ration card would be all it takes to have every other clan jumping up after the spoils, even attempting a general overthrow. I'd rather keep the peace.
She will lead you into Centerist slavery!

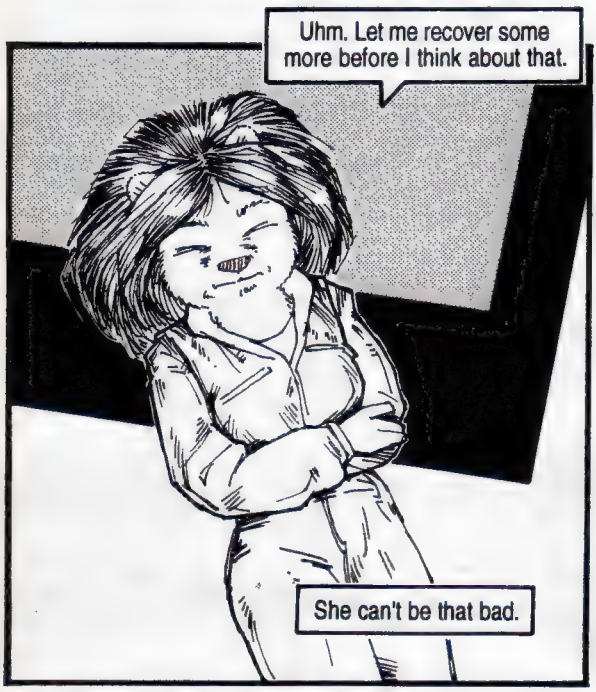
That is enough! I claim my right to Alpha of Henruha!
You selfish fools! You'd risk planet-wide collapse to grasp at some petty advantages within the local hierarchy.
Isn't that what you've always wanted! Now you hold your tongue!
Now, do you all accept me as Alpha? If so, obey me now or reform the clan! If you follow me, you will do best by giving me the freedom to resolve the national conflict as I see fit.
But if any of you do not follow me, I will regard you as enemies of the state, and will deal with you as such!
All right then. Now, come on. I do love you all dearly, but there are greater issues that have to be dealt with.
And Henruha will set the example that other clans will be pressed to match.
Oh, Mother. Don't worry about Dea. You'll still get your grand-pups.


You what?!
I threw down my mother and took over the clan.
But - doesn't that complicate your position with the Homeguard and provisional government?
Well, not really.
As an individual member of a clan, I'd be all but expected to exploit any underhanded opportunity to enhance my clan's status, as would everyone else for their clans. So getting anything done requires elaborate demonstrations that it's not for ulterior intentions.
But as clan leader, I'm suppose to be above all that. So I theoretically have complete freedom of action. Of course, everyone will still keep an eye on me, but it will be at a respectable distance.
And how will your new status affect our situation?
Well, - Though Mother's not exactly a vulpophile, I think the two of you would actually get along together. Especially if I met my procreative obligations to the clan.
Procreative obligations, uhm? We'll see about that.
EF338

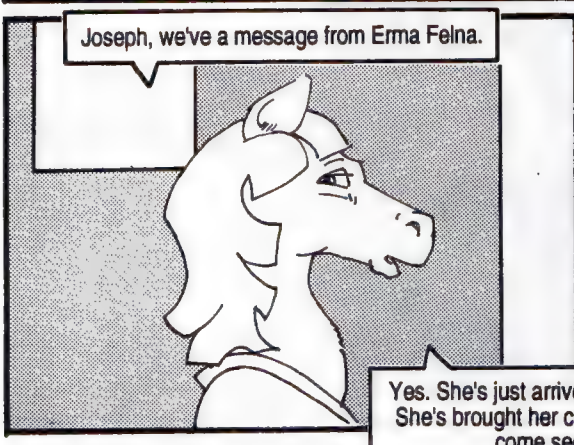
Erma! You okay?
-gasp- Yeah - I guess.

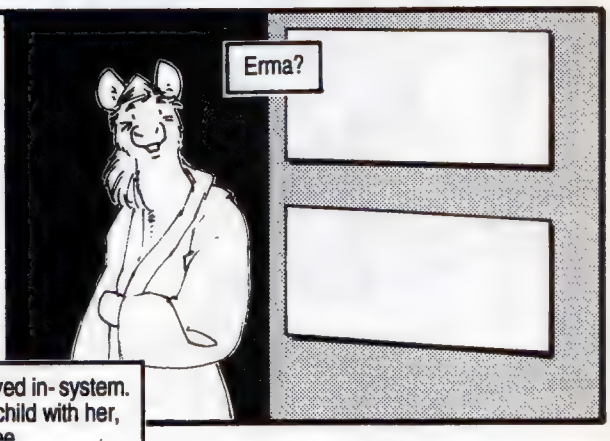
I'm getting better at this, but trust me, better is still not good.

Ugh! But it doesn't last long, thank goodness!
And how are you, Rojigo?
Bad jump!
Thinking of which, are you going to call your mother?


Uhm. Let me recover some more before I think about that.
She can't be that bad.

Ooh, she isn't "bad," just doesn't approve of my profession.
And as I've said before, she still has some residual psych-bugs about me as a symbol and all that.
EF339





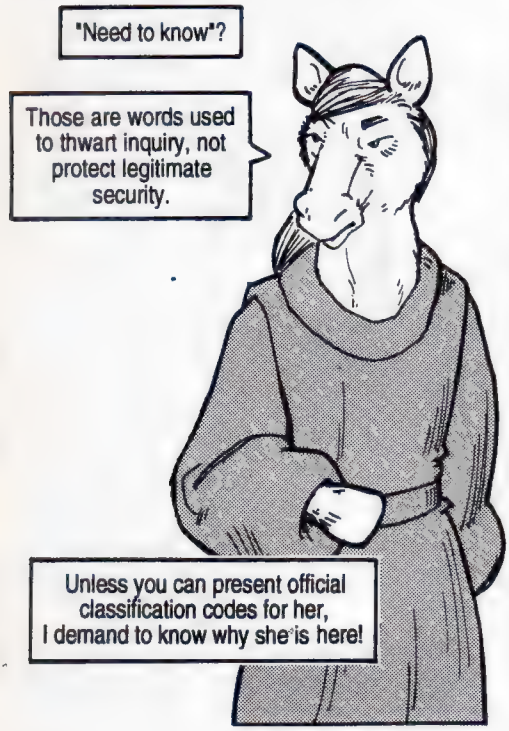
We're scheduled to be out of quarantine by twenty-eight and should be in Annahport the same day. We'll be taking a posting there. When we get together, we'll be able to catch up with all the news, like what's happening with Itzak. We can talk more when we get closer in.

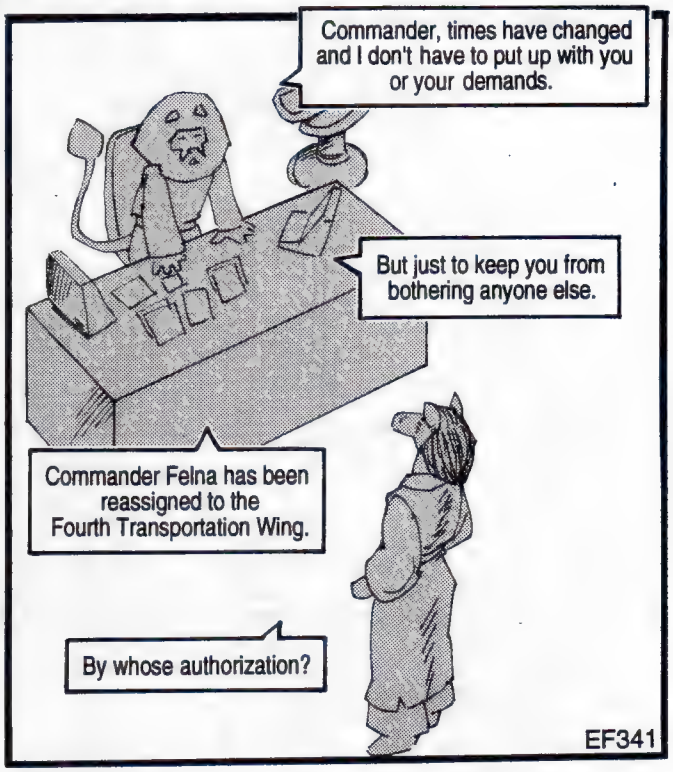
What do you mean?
Erma is an excellent field commander. To bring her here is a waste, or worse.

There is some black work in this.
In light of Itzak's fate, I fear for her.

Ah- Commander Arrat.
On the matter of Commander Felna. As a reservist, you realize there are limits to your position.

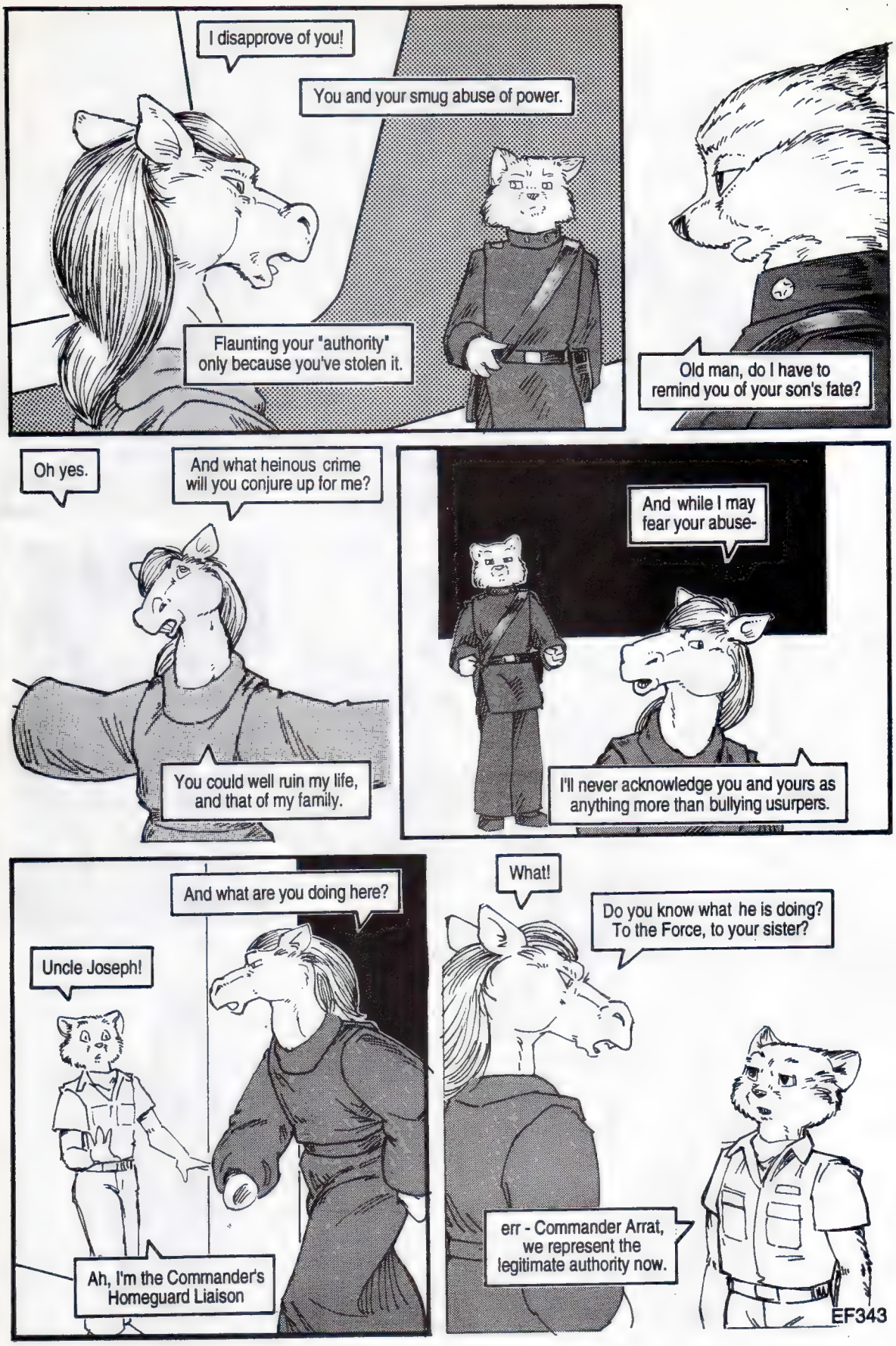
As such, with respect, you do not have a need to know.


"Need to know"?
Those are words used to thwart inquiry, not protect legitimate security.
Unless you can present official classification codes for her, I demand to know why she is here!


Commander, times have changed and I don't have to put up with you or your demands.
But just to keep you from bothering anyone else.
Commander Felna has been reassigned to the Fourth Transportation Wing.
By whose authorization?

EF341

Commander Arrat.
A pleasure to meet you.
It is a rare privilege to have an old veteran come to call.
Worried about Erma, are you?
She'll be well taken care of.
Ah. I know who you are, Tavak Ikalik, and can well guess why you now persecute Erma. But that you would go to such effort to do so is incredible.
Oh, I won't deny some lingering personal issues, but her recall was more official. It was felt, as she isn't much of a team player, that it would be better for the service if she was put on a short leash.
She's too much a loose cannon to be in a remote station. Might get wild ideas and abuse her authority.
Yes, and we can't have any of that, can we?
Oh - you disapprove of our sense of mission?


I disapprove of you!
You and your smug abuse of power.
Flaunting your "authority" only because you've stolen it.
Old man, do I have to remind you of your son's fate?
Oh yes.
And what heinous crime will you conjure up for me?
You could well ruin my life, and that of my family.
And while I may fear your abuse-
I'll never acknowledge you and yours as anything more than bullying usurpers.
And what are you doing here?
Uncle Joseph!
Ah, I'm the Commander's Homeguard Liaison
What!
Do you know what he is doing? To the Force, to your sister?
err - Commander Arrat, we represent the legitimate authority now.
EF343

Hello, this is Commander Felna. I am calling to introduce myself to the commander of the Fourth Transport Wing. I have only the briefest outline of the organization and its mission and would like to get to know the unit as well as possible before I actually get there. Included with this transmission are my extended biographic file and some wish-list notes regarding my position. Please contact me at your earliest convenience.

I am Wing Commander Chhptht. I have reviewed your file. Your assignment is to be a line pilot, providing routine logistical support for EDF and ConFed operations all around Annah. I am not interested in your career goals or operational philosophy. You will report to me and follow my orders. That is all.

Humph! Image the nerve of that female!

Girl trouble again?

No, it's this pilot, Felna. Coming off as some kind of hot shot.

Felna? Kanoc's daughter?

Uh? I don't know.

Let me see.

Yes, it is. She's the one from the Derzon action. The pilot who got into the ground fight.

Oh, yeah, I remember.

Her personal file barely mentions it, and the offical data only says she was in the task force.

Makes you wonder about the rest of her file.

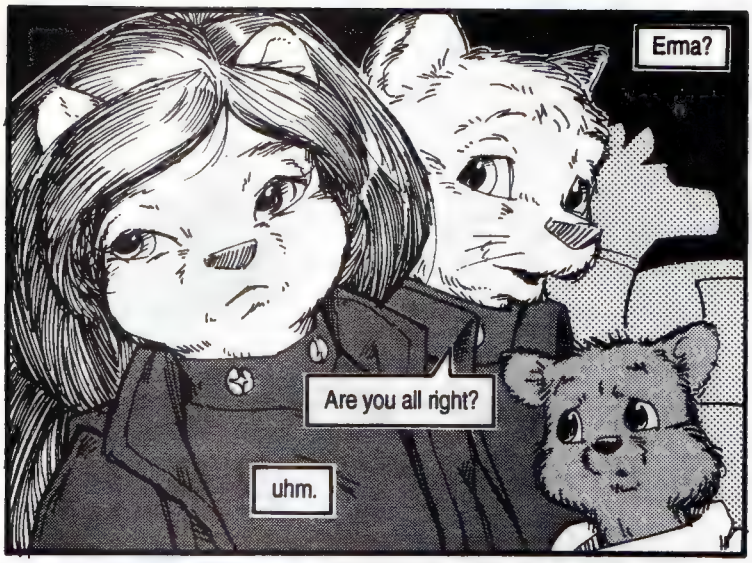
Looks like you got a real asset.

Yeah, but I don't get it. With her file, she could have *my* job, but her assignment could be filled by any junior pilot.

Well, if you ask me -.

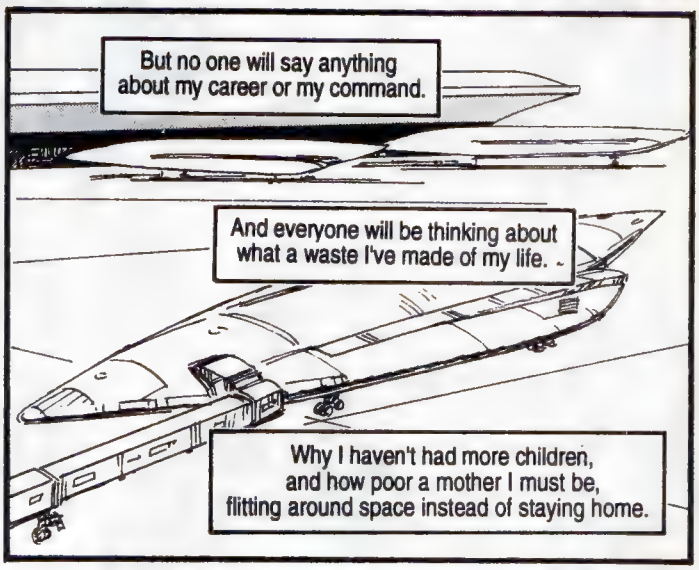
With all the *unusual* activity going on, she could be a ringer.

EF345

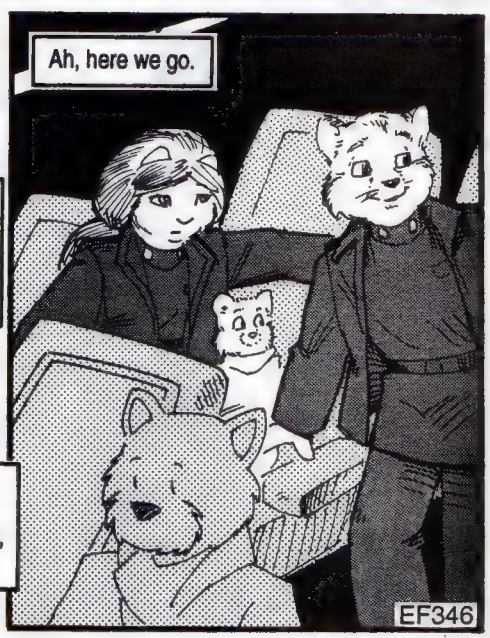

Emma?
Are you all right?
uhm.

This should be my triumphant homecoming.
Hero of Derzon and Ekosiak. My family's pride and joy.

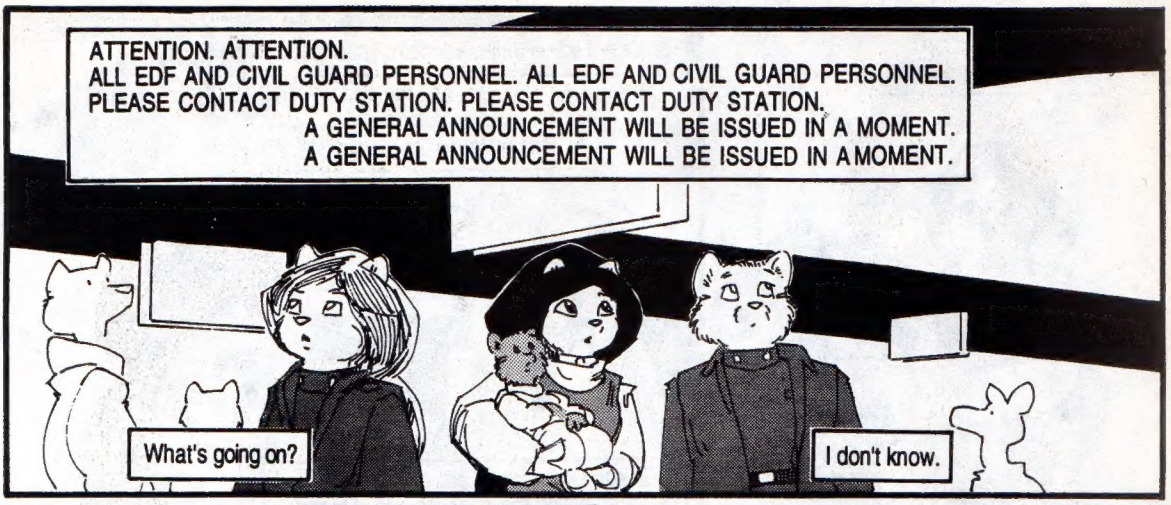
Everyone will be delighted with Ro'. Everyone will be curious about you.


But no one will say anything about my career or my command.
And everyone will be thinking about what a waste I've made of my life.
Why I haven't had more children, and how poor a mother I must be, flitting around space instead of staying home.

Can it really be that bad?
Maybe not, but they're all very *rational* people, techies or academicians, and see my ambitions as being not entirely sensible.
How did they deal with your father?
Back then, they were still trying to define what a military was. And afterwards, they could pity him.


Ah, here we go.

Mother.
Erma, Afon, Rojigo.
Your father is at home, along with Tahdem, Kennika, and the little cousins.
Your brother is away on assignment. He is attached to the EDF headquarters unit at Tobau.
Ro', this is your grandmother; remember her from the videos?
'Lo, gra'ma.
Hello, little Rojigo. Do you want to talk to me for a while?
Smell nice, gra'ma.
Thank you, Rojigo. Now you come with me.
How is everything?
As well as can be expected.
Your father has been keeping busy.
EF347


ATTENTION. ATTENTION.
ALL EDF AND CIVIL GUARD PERSONNEL. ALL EDF AND CIVIL GUARD PERSONNEL.
PLEASE CONTACT DUTY STATION. PLEASE CONTACT DUTY STATION.
A GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE ISSUED IN A MOMENT.
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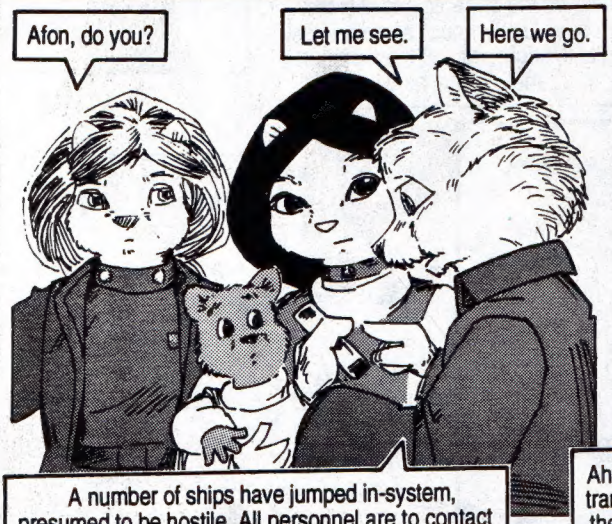
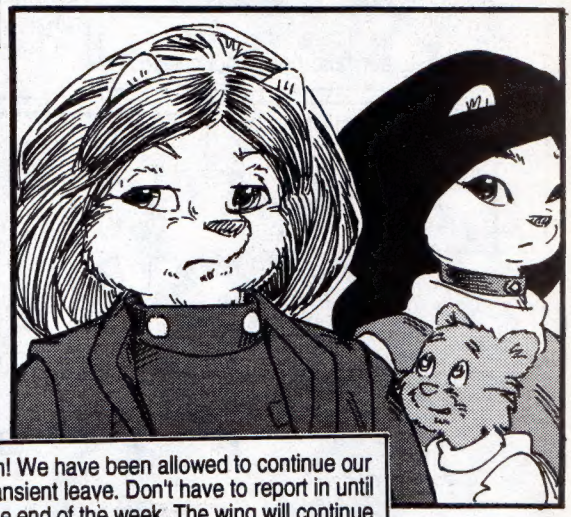
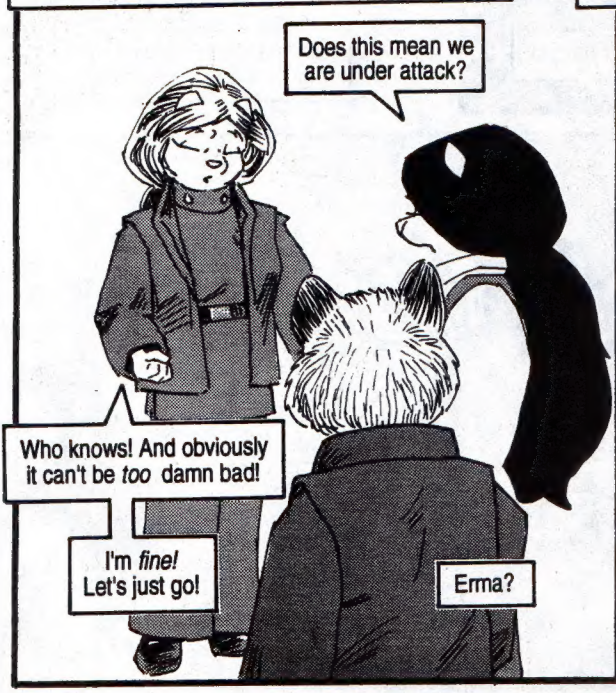
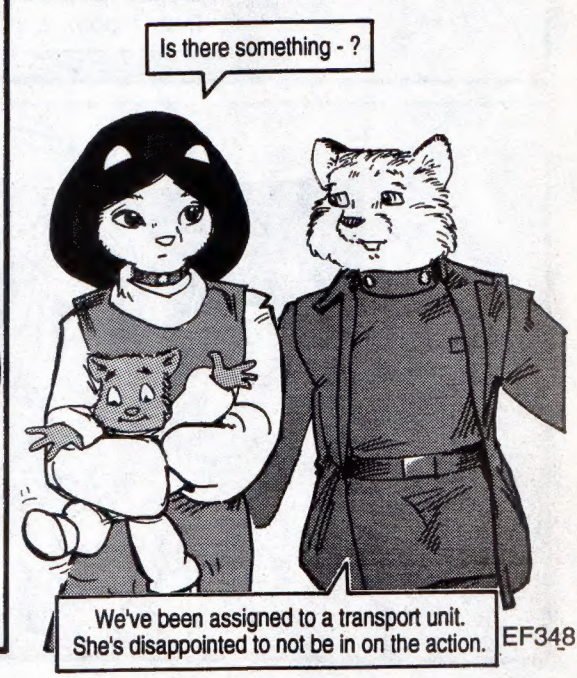
What's going on?
I don't know.

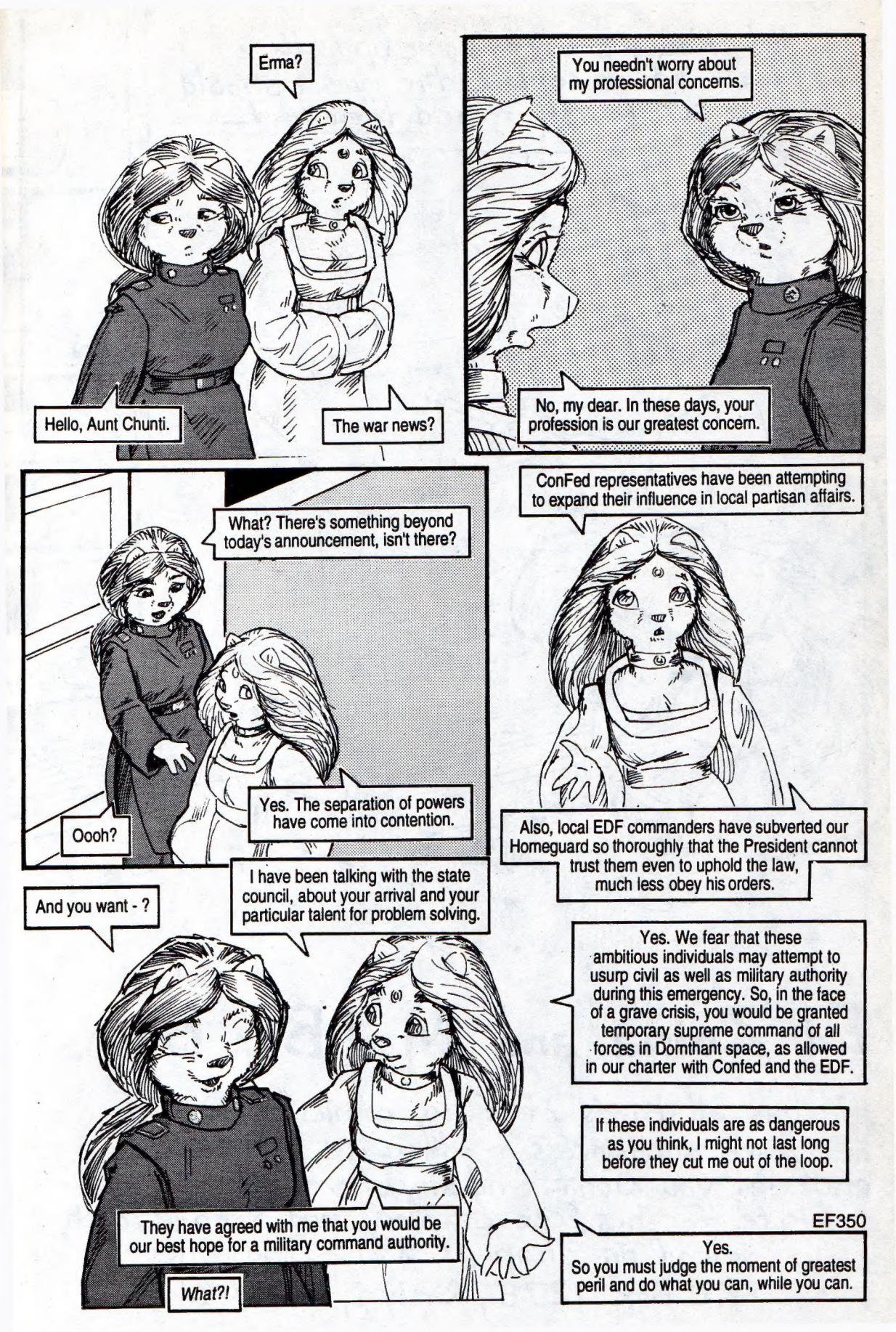

Afon, do you?
Let me see.
Here we go.
A number of ships have jumped in-system, presumed to be hostile. All personnel are to contact their commands for deployment orders. And we -


Ah! We have been allowed to continue our transient leave. Don't have to report in until the end of the week. The wing will continue normal operations for the time being.


Does this mean we are under attack?
Who knows! And obviously it can't be *too* damn bad!
I'm *fine!* Let's just go!
Erma?


Is there something - ?
We've been assigned to a transport unit. She's disappointed to not be in on the action.

In on the action? Like some great game?
No Ma'am. I don't think you understand her, or her position.
She's not some thrill-seeking hot-shot pilot.
Do you know the actions she's been in?
In each case, she's played a pivotal role, even saved the day a couple of times. While it's been luck as much as anything else, being in the right place at the right time, she is a real hero.
And I suspect she feels, though she won't admit it, that she is - ah, I don't know, destined for greatness or something.
Things happen with her around.
Anyway, things are happening and she has been sidelined.
And she is afraid of what may happen without her.
EF349


Erma?
Hello, Aunt Chunti.
The war news?
You needn't worry about my professional concerns.
No, my dear. In these days, your profession is our greatest concern.
What? There's something beyond today's announcement, isn't there?
Oooh?
Yes. The separation of powers have come into contention.
ConFed representatives have been attempting to expand their influence in local partisan affairs.
Also, local EDF commanders have subverted our Homeguard so thoroughly that the President cannot trust them even to uphold the law, much less obey his orders.
And you want - ?
I have been talking with the state council, about your arrival and your particular talent for problem solving.
Yes. We fear that these ambitious individuals may attempt to usurp civil as well as military authority during this emergency. So, in the face of a grave crisis, you would be granted temporary supreme command of all forces in Dornthant space, as allowed in our charter with Confed and the EDF.
If these individuals are as dangerous as you think, I might not last long before they cut me out of the loop.
They have agreed with me that you would be our best hope for a military command authority.
What?!
Yes.
So you must judge the moment of greatest peril and do what you can, while you can.